

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PRS-01 SS-15 SSO-00 NSCE-00 NSC-05

RSC-01 /032 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/ARN:DDEAN:DAV

APPROVED BY NEA/ARN:DAKORN

NEA/P:MVANORDER

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O 032248Z JAN 75

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 001474

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR,US, XF

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT FORD'S INTERVIEW WITH HELEN THOMAS

REFERENCE: DAMASCUS 00015

1. DEPARTMENT HAS OBTAINED FROM UPI A COPY OF DEC. 28 INTERVIEW BY HELEN THOMAS OF PRESIDENT. THERE IS IN THIS INTERVIEW NO REPEAT NO REFERENCE TO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. PRESIDENT'S REMARKS CENTERED GENERALLY ON DOMESTIC AND PERSONAL MATTERS. THERE ARE ONLY TWO SECTIONS WHICH DEAL WITH MIDDLE EAST. BOTH ARE QUOTED BELOW.

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED.

2. BEGIN QUOTE: PRESIDENT FORD FIRMLY BELIEVES THERE IS A QUOTE HIGH LIKELIHOOD OF WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST UNQUOTE UNLESS THE UNITED STATES CAN GET ISRAEL AND THE ARABS TO NEGOTIATE FURTHER MILITARY DISENGAGEMENTS. END QUOTE.

BEGIN QUOTE: THE PRESIDENT'S WARNING ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF MIDDLE EAST WAR CAME WHEN HE WAS ASKED ABOUT A COLUMNIST'S REPORT THAT FORD BELIEVED RENEWED FIGHTING COULD BREAK OUT IN THE AREA IN SIX MONTHS.

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QUOTE. I FIRMLY BELIEVE, UNLESS THERE IS SOME MOVEMENT

ON A STEP-BY-STEP BASIS (TOWARD) PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
THERE'S A HIGH DEGREE, THERE'S A HIGH LIKELIHOOD OF WAR,

UNQUOTE HE SAID.

ASKED WHAT HE PLANNED TO ABOUT IT, FORD REPIED: QUOTE
KEEP ON WORKING, TRYING TO GET ISRAELIS AND ARABS TO EXPAND
THE DISENGAGEMENT EFFORTS THAT WERE SUCCESSFUL IN 1973 AND
1974, TO BROADEN THE AGREEMENTS (BETWEEN) THE ISRAELIS AND
THE ARAB NATIONS. IF WE KEEP WORKING ON IT, AND GET SOME
SUCCESS, I THINK WE CAN PREVENT ANOTHER BLOODY CONFLICT...
UNQUOTE.

DELARING HE WAS ENCOURAGED DESPITE RISING TENSIONS IN THE
AREA, FORD SAID: QUOTE I THINK ALL PARTIES RECOGNIZE
ANOTHER WAR WOULD BE A REAL TRAGEDY, BOTH IN LIVES LOST
AND THE FINANCIAL COST. I THINK I;S CONSEQUENCES COULD
BE VERY SERIOUS UNQUOTE.

THE PRESIDENT SAID IT WOULD BE QUOTE INAPPROPRIATE UNQUOTE
TO COMMENT ON RECURRING REPORTS THERE IS A NATIONAL SECURITY
COUNCIL CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR THE UNITED STATES TO TAKE OVER
SOME ARAB OIL FIELDS--OR HELP ISRAEL TO DO SO--IF THERE IS
ANOTHER EMBARGO. END QUOTE.

3. DEPARTMENT NOT AWARE OF ANY VERY RECENT MENTION BY
PRESIDENT OF GENEVA CONFERENCE. KISSINGER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS CONFERENCES, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975STATE001474
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: DDEAN:DAV
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750004-0088
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750178/aaaacqxb.tel
Line Count: 88
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 DAMASCUS 00015
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 JUN 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <15 SEP 2003 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT FORD'S INTERVIEW WITH HELEN THOMAS
TAGS: PFOR, US, XF, (FORD, GERALD R), (THOMAS, HELEN)
To: DAMASCUS
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006